

First Hitchhike Adventure of 2015: Niigata to Osaka



With another man also hitchhiking! His partner with him took the photo



The green line shows my route along the Hokuriku and Meishin expressway from Niigata in the north to Osaka in the south.

January 16, 2015: I had been intending for months to visit my good American friend from the State of Arkansas, Roger. I've especially been meaning to tell him about my new understanding of the [70th Week of Daniel](#)! He lives in the big city of Osaka, Japanese second largest city. Though Osaka is 550 kilometers (344 miles) from home which is 125 kilometers (75 milers) further than Hirosaki in Aomori (my usual destination), it is actually easier to hitchhike to Osaka than Aomori. This is because of an unbroken expressway most of the distance. When I hitchhike to Aomori, I'm mostly traveling on a regular road with stoplights.



The first driver to pick me up.

It was raining the previous evening but good weather the day of this trip. I took public transportation (680 yen or about \$6.00) to Sakai Parking area on the Hokuriku Expressway. Sakae is a convenient place to hitchhike because I can go from there 3 different directions, either to Tokyo, Nagano or towards Osaka which includes Toyama, Ishikawa and Fukui Prefectures. But the parking area is not so big, and sometimes I've had to wait long periods to catch a ride, often an hour, sometimes two hours, and once 3 hours and 40 minutes!

I used to stand near the entrance ramp just before cars re-enter the expressway, but now I stand close to the concession stands where people walk after parking their vehicles. I learned this gives me more opportunity to catch a ride. Anybody who notices me or the A4 paper sign which shows my destination, I try to make eye contact with them and ask them if they would take me. Most say no but some stop to talk and encourage me. And doing so proves to them I can speak and understand their language. One reason why a person may not pick me up is because he or she fears the foreigner (me) cannot communicate with them in Japanese.

Though I have waited for long periods at Sakae parking area, today the very first man I met offered me a ride! He was going to Kashiwazaki, about 40 kilometers away. This was good for me because it took me to a parking area past Niigata Prefecture's second largest city of Nagaoka where most of the drivers would be exiting the expressway.

The young man took me to Ozumi parking area just past Nagaoka. This parking area is smaller than Sakae, but more than half of the traffic will be traveling past the next large city of Kashiwazaki in the direction I want to go. After a relatively short time, a printer from Niigata City took me to Yoneyama service area just past Kashiwazaki.

Yoneyama is much larger than either Ozumi or Sakae, but much of the traffic will only go as far as Joetsu City, and some of the traffic will go toward Nagano Prefecture. It's possible to go to Oaaka through Nagano, but the distance is longer. I would only accept a ride from a man going through Nagano if he were going as far as the cities near the southern edge of Nagano near Nagoya. That would definitely make it work going to Osaka via Nagano because it would be more than half the distance in a single ride. But such a scenario is rare.

After close to an hour wait at Yoneyama I caught a ride from a man going to Toyama city. He took me to Arisoumi service area, a good distance of 125 kilometers, the furthest in a single ride so far today.

After considerable wait for over an hour, a sweet couple from Ueda City in Nagano took me to Oyabegawa service area which is past Toyama city. Oyabegawa SA is large with many cars, but most of them would be going only as far as Kanazawa City in Ishikawa. I needed a ride that would take me past Kanazawa, and preferably to somewhere in Fukui Prefecture.

A gas lady gas station attendant approached me and asked my destination. She said she would tell the customers about me and maybe one of them would offer me a ride. I have been helped before by gas station attendants. A few minutes later she walked me to me with a cup of hot coffee in her hands! I'm not supposed to drink coffee because I consider [caffeine an evil addicting drug which is harmful for health](#), but I accepted her gift and drank it. I don't want to offend the Japanese who show me much kindness.

After 30 some minutes a lady going to Fukui offered me a ride. She took me to Onagatani just before Fukui city. From that point I was more than halfway to Osaka and absolutely positive I would make it that day.

A man saw my Osaka sign and told me he would be going a different direction, to Nagoya. But I realized that he could still take me further down the Hokuriku Expressway before he gets to the junction of the Meishi Expressway from where drivers can go either south to Osaka or north to Nagoya. The man then offered to take me as far as Kanda parking area just before the Maibara junction.

Kanda is a small parking area and I regretted getting off there. I could have gotten off at Shizugatake, a much larger service area though a shorter distance from where the man picked me up. But after only a few minutes, a lady saw my Osaka sign and offered to take me to Taga Service area. Though Taga is not far from Kanda, it is right on the Meishin expressway with all the traffic going my direction.

At Taga after 30 minutes or so, I approached a truck driver who offered me a ride to Suita Service area in Osaka! This was my exact destination and the end of hitchhiking that day. I arrived just a little after 5 p.m., 10 hours after I left home. From Suita it was a short walk to a bus stop from where I caught a 220 yen (\$1.75) bus ride to Minami Senri station, and from there a 15 minute walk to Roger's apartment. Total transportation that day was 900 yen or about \$7.50. The Shinkansen (Bullet train) would have cost 22,000 yen (\$175.00) and by plane 33,000 yen (\$275).